DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 200 UD 021 143

AUTHOR Quick, Sandra
TITLE A Systematic Approach to Improved Parental Involvement at the Secondary Level in a Desegregated School Setting.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; *Desegregation Effects; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; *School Community Relationship; *School Desegregation; Secondary Education; *Secondary Schools; Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

Few parents who have high school children enrolled in distant public schools as a result of court ordered desegregation are involved in those schools. This paper presents practical approaches toward encouraging parent participation in their children's education under the circumstances of desegregation. The approaches were gathered from diverse sources, including (1) personal interviews with secondary school administrators who have succeeded in involving parents while operating under court ordered desegregation, (2) modified models of elementary level approaches, (3) available written materials, and (4) the author's personal experience. The importance of communication between the desegregated school and the general community is stressed. Future trends related to parental involvement and school desegregation are discussed. (GC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Sandra Quick
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO IMPROVED PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL IN A DESEGREGATED SCHOOL SETTING

Sandra Quick

ED198200

It is well documented that there is a multitude of non-working middle-class mothers who serve as PTA room mothers, make play costumes and bake cookies for primary classrooms. The multitude decreases when one examines the numbers of non-working mothers who attend science fairs, extra-curricular sports activities and musical programs at the intermediate and middle-school level. The picture becomes quite bleak when the statistics quote the number of working mothers who volunteer any assistance to classroom teachers at the secondary level. But most concerting is the almost non-existent number of working mothers and/or fathers who are not involved, at any level, in their child's educational process, especially those parents who have high school aged children in cross-town schools because of court-ordered desegration.

The problems are slightly different in a desegregated setting and require a variety of tactics to implement solutions. The first and most obvious problem is that of parental awareness about school building policies, functions and activities. Naturally, parents who have a limited knowledge about how schools in general operate, are apprehensive about getting involved. School district-wide campaigns to inform parents about the overall function of the total district's operations often fail to have that personalized appeal to the specific target audience. Therefore, school building communication directed towards their respective student's parents becomes imperative.

UD021143

Once the parent's eyes are open to what's going on in their child's school, the next hurdle is getting them in the building for consultation, grade card pick-up, extra-curricular activities, fund-raising drives, or volunteer services. Most often in a desegregated school setting, the student population is far from a geographically homogenious one. Parents have to drive, get a taxi or ride the bus for distances of two to ten miles to get to the school site. Anxiety, centering around the unfamiliar neighborhood that parents must travel to, often prohibits parents from taking that giant step to the school door.

If parents are willing to venture out and arrive at the school door, the next problem is what to do with them. Lack of meaningful avenues for involvement at the secondary level has plagued administrators for some time. Addressed in this paper are practical approaches that address these problems on how to get parents actively involved or, at least, lure the "phantom parent" into the school building.

Approaches were gathered from many diverse "arenas." They include personal interviews with secondary school administrators who have attempted and succeeded in initiating parent involvement at the secondary level while operating under court-ordered desegregation, modified models of elementary approaches, sparse relevant reference material, and the personal experience of this writer. It should be noted that each approach may not work for each respective school situation. School administrators should plan the pattern of change for their school district after careful consideration of all the provided models.

Before directly addressing the topic, it is appropriate to provide a short background relating to parental and other citizen participation in the public educational system. In Harold Laswell's book, A Pre-View of Policy Sciences, a model of citizen participation includes an octagon with segments of the community that represent eight different groups. These groups include:

1. power - government, unions;
2. rectitude - churches, courts;
3. respect - fraternities, sororities, scouts, civil rights groups;
4. well being - health, security, supporting societies and organizations;
5. wealth - land, business, banking, insurance, foundations, the poor;
6. enlightenment - media, higher education, research organizations;
7. skill - proprietary schools, nonpublic, manpower, CETA; and
8. affection - parents, PTA and families.[1]

It is the later category of affection, parents per se, that will be stressed herein. The support of parental involvement is important. Noted educators in recent reports have urged parents to get involved in their children's schools. Barbara Sizemore, former superintendent of Washington, D.C. public schools, refers to an EXCEL-PUSH, Inc. conference where supporters of this issue stated:

> Haskins flatly called for the involvement of poor parents in any policy-making affecting their lives. Poussaint, a black psychiatrist, supported this claim noting that EXCEL was concentrated in high schools where there was the least participation of parents. He urged a more active parental participation beginning with parents of very young children (Sizemore, p. 367).[2]

The federal government, in a recent report on urban schools, noted:

> The fact that research on adolescence is scant and the list of necessary research topics discouragingly long. We know little about skill development in teens, about how to prepare youth for careers, of the impact of the urban environment on adolescent learning or of minority-isolated and culturally biased schooling on adult life changes. Stress classroom vs. experiential learning, time on task, teacher attitudes, private sector involvement and secondary school effectiveness, parental interest at the secondary level, support networks and motivation in adolescence are all areas where expanded information is needed. (The Urban High School Reform Initiative, Final Report, September 1979, USOE, DHEW, Thomas Burns, p. 120.)[3]

In most instances the inception of a program to improve parental involvement at the secondary level, especially in a desegregated school

setting, is an innovative practice. It will require commitment on the part of those who undertake the project. A practical guide to the introduction of planned change in a school is the topic of an article by John Pincus and Richard C. Williams. Their suggestions are noteworthy. First, they describe an innovative school district which is more likely to undertake this commitment as one "that had undertaken a comprehensive, self-initiated, and locally designed program intended to improve its instructional or managerial capabilities" (Planned Change, p. 730).[4]

The model is described as a sequenced framework for implementing planned change in school districts. The components are:

1. establishing a zone of protective tolerance - conditions in a school district must be favorable to the design and implementation of planned changes;

2. implementing the leadership component - the process of planned change requires a person or a group to recognize that the environment for change is propitious and to assert leadership to initiate and implement the change;

3. building an appropriate planning and delivery system - some methods must be devised that will allow the school district to provide the benefits of the innovation to its clients (students, parents, or citizens);

4. deriving the benefits - the benefits may take many forms including the attainment of the innovation's primary goals and secondary goals; and

5. maintaining stability - progress is attained only at the cost of risk taking, long hours, hard work and tough decisions (pp.731-732).[5]

To follow this format and incorporating a needs assessment and valid evaluation will provide the implementor with a much smoother, comprehensive and effective program. The approaches which follow are variations, modifications and adaptations of existing models for parental involvement to suit this particular situation.

The first approach is a popular model which was originally designed for early childhood to early adolescence. It was designed by George S. Morrison. He defines parental involvement as much more than a teacher aide or helper in delivering services to children in a classroom to a much broader view of how the parent can work into the structure of a total program.[6] To identify the forces responsible for the current interest in parental involvement in the local area is a key factor. By local area, it is understood that local and neighborhood are not one in the same in this desegregated high school setting. The implementor should compare and contrast philosophies, activities and features of specific programs, and develop an attitude of supporting evidence for these philosophies. Consideration should be given to the similarities and differences between skills of those working with parents and those skills necessary to complete the required tasks. For example, the consideration of key personnel skills necessary to actually work with parents is imperative. Usually, it is building-level educators who work with the parents. Rarely is it administrative central office staff who make the decisions to initiate such a program.

Certain factors in the plan should be examined. First, the building principal should be supportive of and enthusiastic about the parent involvement plan. His/her guidance and supervision of the overall enforcement of a program is vital to its success. Second, the background

of the classroom teacher and how extensively he/she will be involved in the plan should be considered. Inservice workshops tailored to the plan should be held so that teachers will have a full working knowledge of the plan and so that candid "no-matter-how-ridiculous-or-mundane-they-may-seem" questions can be answered openly and honestly before embarrassments or conflicts arise. A knowledge of the specific attendance neighborhood from which the parents will come should be a part of the total package, not just a "typical" inner-city block or middle-class suburban street. A planned, escorted daytime riding orientation of the target geographic sites is feasible and non-threatening for both teachers and principals. Third, the actual duties, assignments or mode of involvement should be established and clearly defined in writing prior to the onset of the implementation. A trial period should be formulated with a mechanism which allows for change due to personal or other impending conflicts such as a change in work schedule for the parent.

Naturally, such a task as playground duty is irrelevant and a waste of resources, but there are areas in a high school curriculum where parents can serve a vital function; however, educators must be cognizant of rules and regulations relative to volunteer assignments. One commonly overlooked area is parental support for the "concept of public education." This support can be initiated by parents without them even leaving the comfort of their home or by being as actively involved as they wish. By not "bad-mouthing" public education and generally speaking favorably about "the schools," parents can begin to raise the support level of friends and neighbors of "the schools." Whether to attend or not attend a public school is, of course, an individual choice; however, those

that do choose to send their children to public schools should, at the very least, hold some respect and acknowledgement for what it will mean to their children's future success. In grocery stores, churches, civil and community organizations, the topic of public education should be supported by parents. An all-out campaign targeted toward this audience for their support would be worthwhile. That's nice, you say, but how do I get the parents enthusiastic enough to support the schools? The answer is effective communication.

The 1980 Year of the Schools in Ohio Handbook reinforces the importance of good community communication.

> A commitment to provide expanded opportunities for the sharing of information between schools and their communities is the first step toward improving communication. The second step is to become familiar with the public's attitude toward its schools (p. 4).[7]

The 1979 Gallup poll provides national data which indicates:

1. The best source of information is word of mouth, personal involvement, etc.

2. The best single source of information about schools is the local newspaper.

3. The best information-exchange package includes the following:

   a. media that devotes more time to reporting on student achievement, efforts to solve school problems, and new educational developments

b. more teacher-parent conferences

c. more workshops, meetings, courses, special lectures, or events planned to increase school-community contacts

d. more use of volunteers or aides in the school program (p. 6).[8]

From the articles "50 Communication Ideas That Work" and "Tips on Tying Nonparents to Schools," are just a few of the ideas that are relevant to this particular topic.

Develop a planned, systematic, two-way process of communication between your district and its external and internal publics.

The most effective communications take place closest to the child. Every school should have a school newsletter.

Issue a parent report card--you grade us.

Have feedback cards concerning the school district at parent-teacher conferences.

Hold special programs for students and parents to work together on projects.

Hold breakfasts for dads at the school cafeteria.

Place suggestion boxes in school, businesses and public buildings.

Take-your-child-to-lunch program. Encourage parents to join their children at school for lunch.

Special display posters with built-in pockets for printed materials concerning the local schools. Use at grocery stores, banks, churches, shops, etc.

A letter from the superintendent to the parents of graduating seniors congratulating them on the support they have given their children to make their graduations possible.

Have an all-school brainstorming day to get several hundred workable communications ideas which are uniquely appropriate to your school.

Have student tour leaders, student hosts and hostesses for visitors to your school. There's nothing more infectious than students' pride in their school.

Have a bus "open house" to stress the importance of transportation and the bus driver's role. Include bus drivers as one of your priority audiences and parents.

Have an "alumni day" for former students and parents.

Consider employing a part-time or full-time person who is trained in communications and has skills which will help your district.

Have the school paper or newsletter feature a citizen of the month.

Allow residents of the community to audit, or even take full part in, classes at the high school such as foreign language courses.

Host parents in classrooms to teach and demonstrate unusual hobbies, to tell of history they have lived, etc.

For urban large school districts, organize a Community Network for disseminating the school news and for working as partners with the school district. You can call it The

> Community Network for Public Education and include task forces from business, religious community, advisory committees, PTA, civic and service groups, higher/private education, realtors and youth groups.
>
> Open schools for more adult education at night and on weekends.
>
> Open schools for more adult cultural events.
>
> Teach a unit on city or state government, using not only teachers, but also school board members and parents. Teach what the school board can and can't do.
>
> Watch the papers and use visitors from other ethnic groups or from other lands as visiting teachers/lecturers--resource people in the classrooms.[9]

Any of the ideas above can work and will work. A few other suggestions for school building administrators are fun nights with bingo, cards and other adult games just for a parents' night out. No discussion of school or pupil performance will be mentioned by parent or teacher. It could be just a get-acquainted, non-threatening, enjoyable evening two or three times a year.

Rev. Jesse Jackson supports parental involvement in a statement in a position paper about Project EXCEL.

> We must also have total involvement, for only total involvement in the educational process will allow us to close the gap. We must broaden the base of participation and responsibility (parents, pupils, preachers, teachers, media, etc.) in education (p. 2).[10]

He suggests six avenues of involvement:

1. state of the school address;

2. student pledges;

3. parent pledges - parents must pledge to accept the responsibility to monitor their child's study hours, and agree to go to school to pick up their child's report card each grading period;

4. teacher pledges;

5. written ethical code of conduct; and

6. voter registration for the graduating seniors.[11]

The blame for the lack of involvement cannot totally rest on the shoulders of the parents, teachers or the bureaucracy. One of the reasons for the lack of involvement starts with the junior high/middle school aged student. The early adolescent is attempting to break the ties of "mommy hanging around all the time." It is a time of psuedo-emancipation for preteens from the structures of childhood dependency upon parents. They discourage participation at times to prove to themselves that they <u>can</u> make it on their own. These feelings carry over somewhat into senior high. A review of the social and psychological maturation patterns of the adolescent would be helpful in soliciting their help and using their strengths and talents to get their parents involved.

A look into the future to speculate about the trends in parental involvement at the secondary level in a desegregated school setting are tri-fold. Undoubtedly, the higher education institutions will recognize the importance of equipping the future teacher with the skills necessary to work with parents and minimum standards should be set at the state level (hopefully with funding) to support this effort. An

increased awareness on the part of school board members of the significance and value in parental involvement and support will surface. An obvious advantage is the passage of school bond levies and support of policies that must be adhered to because of the desegregation order. The last dimension of the future trends in parental involvement is that it will increase and expand beyond its present function. Simple building level involvement will expand into community (again not just a neighborhood) and into the political arena to lobby for more equitable distribution of funds, resources and personnel and other pertinent issues regarding desegregated schools.

Those deliberating the idea of improved parent involvement need to do some background work to find out which program best suits their needs. The bibliography provides a starting ground for such research and will lead to further literature if needed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Laswell, Harold D. A Pre-View of Policy Sciences. New York: American Elsevier Publishing Company, Inc., Chapter 2, 1971.

2. Sizemore, Barbara A. PUSH politics and the education of America's youth. Phi Delta Kappan, p. 367, January, 1979.

3. The Urban High School Reform Initiative: Final Report. USDHEW, OE. p. 120, September, 1979.

4. Pincus, John and Williams, Richard C. "Planned change in urban school districts," Phi Delta Kappan, p. 730-731, June, 1979.

5. Ibed.

6. Morrison, George S. Parent involvement in the home, school and community. Merrill, 1978.

7. 1980 Year of the Schools in Ohio Handbook. Ohio Department of Education.

8. Ibed.

9. 50 communication ideas that work. Ohio School Boards Association Journal, pp. 6-7, March, 1979.

10. Operation PUSH. Brief position paper on EXCEL. Chicago, Il.

11. Ibed.

OTHER RELATED RESOURCES

Carol, Lila N. Court-mandated citizen participation in school desegregation. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, Mershon Center, November, 1977.

Coletta, Anthony J. Working together: A guide to parent involvement. Humanics Limited, 1977, LC 225 .063.

Lightfoot, Sara Lawrence. Worlds apart: Relationships between families and schools. Basic Books, 1978, LC 225 .L53.